

## 20 Team Members Win Lean Six Sigma Green Belts

Contributed by Mike Tharp  
Wednesday, 31 May 2006

Calling the Lean Six Sigma management tool "the lexicon of the future," COL Alex Dornstauber awarded 20 District innovators coveted "Green Belt" graduation plaques and key-rings for their participation in the highly influential international business strategy.

The May 22 ceremony was not only the first in the District, but marked the first time Corps-wide that team members had graduated from the Lean Six Sigma (LSS) discipline. "If we leave it here in this conference room, shame on us," exhorted COL Dornstauber. "I want us all to believe, 'I think I can make it better,' so it forces us to embrace the topic."

That topic has emerged as the 21st century's hottest management trend.

Companies ranging from General Electric and Bechtel to Japan's Toyota Motors have embedded LSS into their corporate cultures. LSS projects have resulted in "productivity increases, inventory savings and cycle time reductions," according to the Web site of Caterpillar Logistics Systems, a unit of Caterpillar Inc. which applied LSS inside its plants.

In early May the Corps vaulted onto the LSS bandwagon with an announcement from Headquarters that the "Army is deploying Lean Six Sigma to accelerate business transformation." Eight projects incorporating LSS are in various stages, and the initiative "has been endorsed and encouraged by Army and DoD leadership."

The District LSS projects recognized at the awards ceremony involved a way to reduce overcharging on project funding codes; an effort to standardize the P2 updating process; a review of information technology purchasing processes; and a plan to transfer cell phone bill payments from Information Management to the individual users' organizations.

Posted recently on the District Web site is an interview between MG Ron Johnson, deputy commander of the Corps, and Prof. Mike Morrison of the University of Toyota, near Torrance, Calif. Implementing Lean Six Sigma at all its North American manufacturing plants, Toyota is operating at 108.5 percent of capacity, compared with 86 percent at Chrysler, 81.8 percent at Ford and 80.1 percent at GM.

Morrison told MG Johnson standardization is one of the hallmarks of LSS: "If you can't standardize on the process, standardize on the outcome, standardize on our skills, standardize the values, standardize the outcomes, or something else." He also insisted that "lean" thinking is "not a classroom experience at Toyota—you build the learning into the experience."

Back in October 2004, that approach intrigued Gary Burger, head of the District's Internal Review Office. He began studying the subject, and when COL Dornstauber told him in May 2005 that Headquarters was interested in implementing a full program of LSS, Burger swung into action.

Beginning last Halloween, Burger, one of only three Lean Six Sigma Black Belts in the entire Corps, began conducting classes in LSS systems and processes. The Philadelphia native had received his Master Certificate in Six Sigma online last September from Villanova University after he completed three his Six Sigma Green Belt, Six Sigma Black Belt and Lean classes. Mr. Burger also was one of the first to pass the newly created ASQ Certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt exam.

He then developed and taught LSS classes to four teams of five members each, assigning them the projects mentioned earlier. Each team had a "champion" and a project leader, along with Burger, who encouraged them with a mantra: "I think there's a better way to do it."

At the awards ceremony, each team recounted its process and progress. Members described for the audience their business case, a problem/opportunity statement, a goal statement, the project's scope, its stakeholders and its estimated cost savings. Each team employed a DMAIC worksheet: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control.

Team 1, the Wise (the "sigma" the Greek letter Sigma) Guys, included Glenn Arakaki as champion and Kathy Anderson of PPMD, Keith Ayers of CO, Anthony Henson of SO, Diane Pierson of PPMD and Gretchen Wotherspoon, IM. In trying to standardize the P2 updating process, they cut the time interface between CEFMS and P2 by an estimated eight hours a day per project. "The goal at the end of the day," Henson concluded, was "no project

left behind.”

Calling their achievement “huge,” COL Dornstauder said that before their project, “there was no formalized linkage between CEFMS and P2. Now this is implementable throughout the whole District and Corps.”

Team 2, the Zen Kai Masters, included Mary Bridgewater as champion; Shaun Basu, PPMD; Petra Castillo, IM; Danny Carrasco, CT; Mike Cogan, SO, and Jay Edwards, RM. The team discovered it took an average of 63 working days and 19 steps from delivery of Information Technology equipment until it was installed for the customer. By standardizing and streamlining the process, the team was able to slash the time to eight working days and reduce the number of steps to 14. Basu estimated a cost savings of around \$45,000 a year. IMO’s COL David Turk said the team’s innovation “set my operations side free to do other things, and people out there will be very happy.”

Team 3, the Lean Machine, featured Betty Melendrez of PPMD as project leader; Debra Flores, RE; Al Moreno, IM; John States, PPMD, and Patsy Delgado, sponsor. Their task was to transfer cell phone bill payments from IM to the individual users’ organizations. The team learned that it took 16 steps to pay cell phone bills; they cut it to two steps. “We got it down to one person being able to do it all,” said Melendrez. She estimated the cost savings at \$40,000 in one six-month period.

Team 4, the Emperor Penguins, had COL Dornstauder as champion; Kelli Johnson, PPMD, project leader; Laura Allen, IM; Darrell Buxton, PPMD, and Don Sulzer, PD. Their aim was to reduce and number and amount of overcharges against project labor—“a huge problem,” Buxton said. “We realized all we didn’t know.” Discovering that there wasn’t just one report to provide the information they needed, team members conducted 14 interviews with supervisors and timekeepers. The team eventually recommended that time sheets should be submitted daily, to bring accountability and responsibility to the process, and also suggested a training course taught by District team members to District team members.

“It’s a Corps-wide problem,” COL Dorstauder explained after the team’s presentation. “The team brought up a good point—this was really too large for a small Lean Six Sigma team to take a look at it.

After he handed out the awards and Green Belts, COL Dorstauder was effusive in his praise for the Lean Six Sigma results. “God bless you for what you did,” he said. “Groundbreaking is tough, no matter what. As MG Johnson said at Toyota University, ‘If you’re not doing Lean Six Sigma already, you’re behind the power curve.’”

Like Sun Tzu’s The Art of War, an oriental philosophy that has been incorporated into Pentagon war-gaming, the oriental concept of kaizen stands behind Lean Six Sigma. It is a Japanese term that means “continuous improvement.”

If COL Dornstauder and Gary Burger have their way, that’s just what’ll happen throughout the District.

PICTURES: (From Lean Six Sigma Graduation)